

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies**

Testimony in Support of Increased Juvenile Justice Funding

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As the Director of the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Services, I would like to urge this committee to increase funding for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant programs. Overall federal appropriations for juvenile justice programs have decreased by more than 60 percent since FY 2002, hindering and in some cases dismantling State and local efforts to prevent and reduce delinquent and criminal behavior among our nation's youth. I would like to describe for you how our jurisdiction has been able to use federal juvenile justice dollars to enhance the juvenile justice services provided to the youth and families in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Fairfax County is an ethnically diverse suburban jurisdiction with a population of just over a million people. The Court Services Unit (CSU) serving the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court is responsible for providing probation and residential services to the Court. The CSU provides traditional juvenile probation and parole services to youth who have committed criminal and status offenses (truancy and runaway). The CSU provides a 24/7 juvenile intake unit screening all juvenile complaints brought before the court's attention. Unique to Fairfax County, the CSU also operates a 121 bed Juvenile Detention Center, 2 group homes (boys and girls), a shelter care facility and a supervised release program. The CSU also provides an adult intake unit addressing matters involving custody, visitation and non-support, and provides adult supervision on those adults convicted of misdemeanor intra family offenses and criminal acts against juveniles. The Fairfax County CSU is one of three locally operated Court Service Units in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the largest.

Since 1974, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has played a critical role in organizing and disseminating the results of years of research into effective prevention and intervention strategies designed to reduce delinquency. However, the reduction in OJJDP's budget over the past six years greatly limits their ability to help those of us on the front lines to build our programs on evidence based practices. OJJDP has been a critical player in delinquency prevention and the effective administration of juvenile justice, conducting nationwide and jurisdiction-specific research and evaluation to identify and help states and localities replicate evidenced-

based practices in delinquency prevention and intervention. The collection of evidence based practices that have been systematically vetted, has been an incredible resource for local juvenile justice practitioners who do not have the resources to perform such research. But OJJDP has not been able to continue this function to the level we in the field – and by extension, youth, families and the larger community – are suffering for it.

For the Court Services Unit, JJDP and JABG funds have provided the resources to introduce evidence based practices into our continuum of services. The base budget for our agency which comes from county and state funds covers personnel and operating costs. Even in better economic times, it has been extremely difficult to secure local funding to begin new programs. We have been able to use JJDP funds to develop, implement, and refine many of the programs in our continuum of services. If the programs prove to be a valuable addition, we have often been successful in having them incorporated into our regular budget. Examples of these programs include:

- **Disproportionate Minority Confinement Study (DMC)** We were the first court services unit in the state to use JJDP funds to carry out a study on the overrepresentation of minority youth in our system. This was our first systematic look at this issue and the effort continues to the present.
- **The Detention Release and Services Program (DRS)** was developed from a recommendation of the DMC study described above. The program was a predispositional custody alternative that focused its services mainly on minority youths held in secure detention. The program provided a highly structured and supervised release alternative for youths who could be returned to the community with appropriate supervision and support services. Once grant funding ended DRS was combined with our outreach detention services to become Supervised Release Services. In FY2008, at a cost of \$62 per day, these services provide an alternative to secure detention at a cost of \$239 per day. Only 4 percent of the youth during the year had a new charge while they were under SRS supervision.
- **Young Offender Program (YOP).** YOP was designed to serve youth who were under the age of 14, who had been adjudicated as either delinquent or status offenders. The program provided in depth, timely assessment of both youth and family, and initiated *immediate*, age-appropriate interventions, and linked the youth and family to longer term services if necessary. The focus on special intervention with this age group grew from research funded by the Justice Department that showed that youth involved with the juvenile justice at a very early age were the most likely to become serious and chronic offenders.
- **Juvenile Sex Offender Enhanced Treatment Program:** This program was designed as a replication of the Community-based Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program that was developed at the University of Virginia. The approach was based on the social-ecological perspective that emphasizes the importance of treating the youth in the context of family and community. The

program built on existing services provided by the Court by adding intensive assessment, intensive supervision, small caseloads, and home-based family intervention. The emphasis was on treating these youth in the community rather than in residential treatment programs which can cost in excess of \$100,000 per year.

- **The Maximize Attendance Program (MAP)** provided intensive supervision for adjudicated truants. The purpose of MAP was to expand and improve the range of sanctions and services for adjudicated truants by establishing a post-dispositional intensive supervision program for adjudicated truants.
- **Evening Reporting Center (ERC)** ERC is finishing up its third year of grant funding. The detention alternative program is a highly successful collaboration among the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), the Department of Community and Recreation Services (CRS), and Community Services Board Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS). The ERC provides a community-based alternative to detention for youth currently on probation who would otherwise be detained (at a cost of \$239 per day) pending further court action for a violation of probation. The program provides highly structured and well-supervised group activities during high-risk time periods in the afternoon and early evening, develops skills in youth that support pro-social behaviors, and repairs harm done to the community by providing community service opportunities. Only 7 percent of the youth have received new charges while under program supervision.

We have also taken advantage of JABG funding in a variety of ways. When the JABG program was fully funded, we used the funds to develop the **Intensive Supervision Program (ISP)** for the court's most serious offenders. ISP's goal is to reduce recidivism while keeping youth in the community rather than in more expensive residential placements. ISP provides evening and weekend supervision to youth identified as serious or habitual offenders through SHOCAP and youth on parole/probation who are identified as at high-risk to re-offend. Three ISP probation officers (2.5 positions) work rotating shifts so that, seven nights a week, at least one PO is monitoring the behavior of these youth in the community.

When this funding stream was drastically cut and became unstable, we were lucky to be able to get the program included in our regular operating budget. As it became unclear from year to year whether or not there would be an allocation for JABG we decided we could no longer use the funds for program development that included positions. However, we have been able to use the limited remaining funds to support other services we provide. Some examples include:

- Providing resources for supplies, training and treatment funds in support of our Juvenile Drug Treatment Court program
- Providing outside evaluation of our Detention Sentencing Program

- Increasing the capacity of special high risk populations intervention programs by supplementing the existing treatment contracts for juvenile sex offenders and for young offenders
- Contracting treatment services for juvenile offenders
- Purchasing additional drug and alcohol testing equipment
- Providing staff training in a variety of areas
- Upgrading computer equipment and developing innovative ways to incorporate computers into the field work of probation officers
- Purchasing hardware, software, staff training and programming consultation in order to upgrade and expand the management information system that supports the court's residential programs

All of the things described above have enabled our staff to be more effective in their work with the youth and families who are involved in the juvenile justice system in Fairfax County. OJJDP and the JJDP and JABG programs that it administers are very good investments at all levels. Surely it is more cost effective to provide evidence based interventions to juvenile offenders rather than to wait until they become adults. National research has shown that every dollar spent on evidence-based programs can yield up to \$13 in cost savings, and each child prevented from engaging in repeat criminal offenses can save the community \$2.6 to \$4.4 million. We have seen in our own community how innovative programs have enabled us to keep youth out of much more costly residential facilities with no increase in threat to the public safety.

In conclusion, I realize that we are facing extremely difficult economic times. However, funding of juvenile justice programs, research and grants to state and local government is an investment for the future. I ask the sub-committee to support the restoration of the OJJDP budget to at a minimum at the FY 2002 level of \$6.8 million and hopefully much more.